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EDITORIAL

Women's movements and feminist activism

This issue is dedicated to the changing landscape of women's movements and activism in South Africa (SA) as well as other countries in Africa.

Movements and mobilisation

Over the last two decades the contributions and achievements as well as failures of women's movements and women's activism have been well documented in manuscripts that have specifically focused on Africa and been written from the vantage point of the Global South. Shireen Hassim's landmark study *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa – Contesting Authority* (2006) chronicles and analyses the role of the women's movement in the South African liberation struggle, democratic transition, and the first engagements with institutional politics. She also highlights the role and failures of the ANC Women's League to contribute to substantive gender equality. In her book *Democracy and the Rise of Women's Movements in Sub-Saharan Africa* Kathleen Fallon (2008) engages the issue of women in democratisation processes in Africa and analyses Ghana as a case study.

Aili Mari Tripp, Isabel Casimiro, Joy Kwesiga and Alica Mungwa in *African Women's Movements – Changing Political Landscapes* (2009) provide a fascinating comparative study of women's movements in Cameroon, Mozambique and Uganda. They study the rise of what they call "new women's movements" that differ from the early period of postcolonial women's organising, where organisations were closely associated with the ruling party and the State. New women's movements were formed with their own agendas, leadership and funding. These organisations focus on engagement with institutional politics through campaigns for greater women's representation in government, for example, demanding quotas, women's involvement in policy making and the improvement of women's leadership skills (p.81). These organisations attempted to broaden developmental agendas to include political concerns and aimed to find political solutions for developmental problems. Documentation of women's movements and struggles in Africa has also been done by Gisela Geisler (2004: chapter 6) and in the South African context by Gertrude Fester in *South African Women's Apartheid and Post-Apartheid Struggles: 1980-2014* (2015).

Engaging the State has its own pitfalls for women's movements, though the relationship of women's movements and the State is invaluable for state feminism (feminists working in the State) to be successful and has been well documented (see Mama (1995), Stetson and Mazur (1995)). Women's organisations/movements help to set the political agenda and to put pressure on governments to act in the interest of women. Once this link disappears it is difficult for women/feminists in the State to resist co-optation in male-dominated environments, or face isolation and marginalisation.

During transitions to democracy feminist activism has historically also often led to the creation of structures in the State to promote gender equality. These structures, called national gender machineries, or policy agencies have the ability to consolidate policy initiatives or to rally support among women in government for specific policy issues and legislative demands by women. In Africa national gender machineries are often hijacked by the wives of heads of states, called the "First Lady Syndrome" (see Mama, 1995:40; Van Wyk, 2017), to the detriment of women. In many African states, including SA, structures have been dismantled or amalgamated into dysfunctional Women's Ministries, often closing opportunities for

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women's movements to work with the State. Women's Ministries in Africa are well known for ghettoising women's issues and make it easier for male-dominated governments to marginalise women's issues.

In this issue Gabi Mkhize and Nwabisa Mgcoltyelwa-Ntoni clearly show how important the link between women in government and the women's movement is in their article 'The impact of women's movements' activism experiences on gender transformation policies in democratic South Africa'. They investigate the impact of women's movements' activism on gender transformation policies in democratic society through feminist qualitative research, sampling 33 women employed in leadership positions within the 46 national government departments. The main objective of the study was to investigate African women's leadership experiences and the outcomes of gender transformation policies in the national government departments in SA. The paper highlights the impact of women's movements' activism on the experiences of women in government, which enhances their ability to push for gender issues in government gender transformation policies. The study focuses specifically on gender mainstreaming (GM) and employment equity (EE) as driving gender transformation policies in SA.

Mkhize and Mgcoltyelwa-Ntoni found that women's movements and their activism are in some way linked to women attaining leadership roles, and that the women's movements equipped women with leadership skills that they can now apply in their duties. On the other hand, this article also explores the barriers that hinder women's ability to impact and influence gender transformation policy implementation, mostly linked to a lack of political will on the part of the male-stream patriarchal politics and the slow pace of developing gender policies at ministerial levels. The article illustrates how, despite GM and EE policies, women leaders are still subjugated by interwoven male hegemony, racism, ethnicity, sexism, ageism, and abusive practices in government departments.

In '"Sister Robert, Sister John": Enhancing women's voices and gendered membership of the Uganda Women Parliamentary Association', Hannah Muzee and Joyce Mbongo Épse Endeley highlight the successes of a women's parliamentary caucus in Uganda that united women around policy issues. Although the number of women in Uganda's legislator is above the 30% internationally accepted threshold due to affirmative action policies, women's political power and status in society remain restricted. This led to the formation of the Uganda Women Parliamentary Association (UWOPA) during the fifth Parliament of Uganda that ran for the term 1989 to 1994, a parliamentary caucus aimed at women's empowerment comprising women members of Parliament, and open to male members as associates.

Muzee and Mbongo Épse Endeley discuss the results of a qualitative phenomenological research project in which they interviewed long-serving Ugandan parliamentarians to examine the extent to which women parliamentarians could give voice to women in Parliament, and how collaborations between women's organisations and male legislators in Uganda enhanced women's voices during deliberations.

They describe how the UWOPA has managed to actively represent women's agenda in Parliament and to bolster women's voices during deliberations. They found that the participants who contributed to the making of gender-sensitive laws and policies attributed their success to the power of caucusing, sisterhood and women's collective voice. Secondly, the successful promulgation of certain acts with key importance to women (like the Domestic Violence Act) was ascribed to collaboration with male legislators, some of whom were members of the UWOPA. In deliberative democratic situations where women remain in the minority, partnerships with male legislators are both inevitable and crucial for women parliamentarians. Muzee and Mbongo Épse Endeley highlight the importance for women to make alliances with men in their pursuit of the gradual deconstruction of male privilege and institutional patriarchy in the Ugandan context.

The structures of gender machineries, in tandem with other organised formations, can also be used to pressure government for law reform, taking up, for example, struggles at the intersections of gender, race and class, as Janine Hicks shows in 'Campaigning for social security rights: Women in the informal economy and maternity benefits'. She charts how women in organised labour structures in SA mobilised around a critical gender justice issue, namely access to maternity benefits for self-employed women and women in the informal

economy. Currently, only workers recognised as 'employees' by SA's labour law framework qualify for social security benefits (such as unemployment insurance and maternity benefits), resulting in unconstitutional discrimination against informal economy and self-employed workers. The people most affected by this gap in the legislative framework are marginalised categories of working-class women who are already particularly vulnerable. By continuing to perpetuate their marginalisation, the State contributes to the feminisation of poverty.

Hicks accounts how, in response to a complaint lodged with an attorney by a self-employed complainant who was unable to make contributions towards any insurance fund to ensure she had access to paid maternity leave, the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE), together with the Legal Resources Centre, consulted with key stakeholders to assess the extent of the impact of the apparent gap in SA's labour and social security protection mechanisms. After running consultative workshops, the CGE started collaboration with the Congress of South African Trade Unions to frame this as a critical issue impacting on all classes of working women, and to develop a policy position in this regard. Hicks captures the decade-long process which culminated in an extensive legal and comparative investigation by the South African Law Reform Commission into the feasibility of extending maternity and paternity benefits to self-employed workers (which is in the process of being finalised), as well as the establishment of a national task team to guide SA in its implementation of International Labour Organisation Recommendation 204, on the transition from the informal to the formal economy.

Hicks's article tells a story of sustained, focused and collaborative women's organising, and attests to the crucial role of women's activism in addressing the crippling systemic inequalities that continue to characterise our legal system.

In a powerful issue of *Feminist Africa* (2017) with the theme 'Women's Organizing: Strategy, Voice, Power', Charmaine Pereira engages the relationship between strategy, voice and power and remarks on the longstanding focus of feminist activism in Africa on political parties and the State and how political power is privileged as a space for women's access to voice and decision making. But feminist struggles also traverse different scales of justice, ranging from resource constraints at the local level to global economic inequalities that affect women at the local level (the idea of "glocal" – that the global influences the local).

Women's voices and activism

In SA, after 1994 women's activism turned from the direct action of the Women's National Coalition towards the engagement with institutional politics, with a focus on influencing the legislative and policy agenda. Repertoires of action shifted from protest to working with parliamentary schedules around submissions on legislation. Smaller coalitions of organisations took up struggles around specific laws, in what Gouws (2016) has termed "localized, temporal movements", such as the Shukumisa Campaign (legislation on gender-based violence and sustained activism) and the Alliance for Rural Democracy (on the Traditional Courts Bill). Different types of framing of issues and strategies were needed, such as engaging the Rural Women's Movement that organised women at a grassroots level. The Rural Women's Movement has been one of the mainstays of organising at the local level in SA, in the past organising poor women around local concerns to resist the brutal oppressive tactics of the apartheid State as well as traditional authority structures (Kemp *et al*, 1995:144) and later around the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act. Direct action of poor women is often invisible or erased from history when it is not documented, as was done in *My dream is to be bold: Our work to end patriarchy* (2011) by Feminist Alternatives, a book that manages to capture the voices of grassroots women's activism without their accounts being mediated through the writing of academic scholars.

In this issue Keneilwe Radebe's article 'Is it custom based? Or gender based? Considering the impact of the NMRW as *amicus curiae* in litigation involving rural women' explores how another rural women's movement, the National Movement of Rural Women (NMRW) approaches its role as friend of the court in customary cases involving inheritance, marriage and chieftaincy disputes. The NMRW was established in 1990 with the aim, among other

things, of uniting and empowering rural women in the context of SA where forceful evictions and patriarchal customary law practices still harshly affect rural women's lives, long after the formal ending of colonialism and apartheid.

One of the most important contributions of the NMRW has been to act as *amicus curiae* in cases where women's rights are involved. Radebe identifies two different approaches that the NMRW has taken in such cases, namely the custom-based approach, on the one hand, and the gender-based approach on the other.

A custom-based approach entails advocating for customary law to be seen as an inherently flexible, living system of law, which develops over time to meet the changing needs of the community. A gender-based approach, on the other hand, entails creating an awareness of how the rigid enforcement of laws sometimes results in substantive gender inequality. Radebe shows how this approach can result in a misunderstanding and dismissal of customary practices, which could also have negative effects on women in the long run. She argues that the custom-based approach and the gender-based approach are inherently contradictory, and neither have always been beneficial to women (Perreira, 2017:19).

An article on Nigeria by Afolayan Gbenga Emmanuel, titled 'Hausa-Fulani women's movement and womanhood', provides insight into the attempts of women's organisations to advocate on behalf of Hausa-Fulani women for the domestication of the Minimum Age of Marriage Clause of the Nigerian Child Rights Act (CRA) of 2003, in a context where plural legal systems and entrenched cultural norms complicate attempts to redress gender inequalities.

Gbenga notes that women's movements in the postcolonial world are mostly ignored by scholarly works, which assume that women's subjugation and women's movements are the same across the globe. Moreover, the literature on women in the developing countries appears to be preoccupied with the problem of development and fails to consider women as agents and activists in their own cultural contexts. The women's movements in postcolonial contexts that are recognised, are considered to be the outcome of a linear process of modernisation or development, rather than emerging from within the conditions of the local context.

Contrary to these assumptions, Gbenga argues that neighbourhood-based organisations consisting of poor women have been at the forefront of the struggle in many countries, to ensure the survival of their families under increasingly harsh economic circumstances. This is the context that frames Gbenga's exploration of Hausa-Fulani women's activism around the domestication of the CRA.

Even though Hausa-Fulani women are mostly regarded to be subordinate to men, because of the intersection of Islam and indigenous forms of patriarchy within Hausa-Fulani cultural norms and values, Gbenga points out that many Hausa-Fulani women control the activities of large households, are involved in money-making pursuits, have their own wealth, and can divorce men. Thus, although women are clearly subordinate in certain ways, many are also patently assertive in regard to their rights and the protections assured them through custom and Islamic law. This article therefore attempts to subvert the dichotomy between victim/activist in its analysis of Hausa-Fulani womanhood and illustrates the challenges of building a nuanced feminist movement that can negotiate the complex tensions within contemporary cultures, religions and societies.

A return to direct action

A return to feminist direct action, with repertoires of contentious action, was powerfully demonstrated by students in SA in 2015/2016, with women students being involved in #RhodesMustFall, #OpenStellenbosch, #FeesMustFall and spearheading #EndRapeCulture. Their powerful voices were captured in *Agenda,* 13(3-4) with the theme 'Feminisms and womxn's resistance within contemporary African student movements'. In this issue, with the title 'What is Blackwom?nhood: An intersectional dialogue with the Young Wom?n's Leadership Project', young feminists continue the analysis of a new generation of radical intersectional feminists who fearlessly engage issues of identity, sexuality and womanhood in SA.

For this issue six members of the Young Wom?n's Leadership Project weave together different aspects of their lived experiences in an attempt to make sense of the question: What is Black-wom?nhood? As six diverse women of colour they work through personal experiences related to issues of culture, identity, land and labour, reflecting on the complex and often contradictory effects of power, privilege and disadvantage in their lives. This is also in an attempt to re-centre Black women's experiences in response to the failure of mainstream white, liberal feminism to make sense of and do justice to the lifeworlds of Black women. We hear the voices of five of them.

In the section 'On race and ancestry: "Caught in the mix"', Andrea Alexander, whose ancestry is both coloured and Xhosa, grapples with coloured identity as a creolisation birthed from slavery. Alexander challenges us to trace the hybridity of coloured lineages and creatively reimagine race on the basis of complex and intersecting histories and genealogies.

In the section titled 'On race, culture, and sexuality: Sitting somewhere in the "excremental passages"', Ariana Smit looks at the ways in which South African Indian women subvert the dominant narratives through which their sexuality is regulated, such as ignorance, shame and discipline. Smit imagines South African Indian women to be positioned in the "excremental passages" between the 'inner' and 'outer' body of culture, society and family, as they participate in secretive means of subversion, also through social media.

In 'On race, class, and education: Black feminist activism and rebellion', Chido Nyaruwata explores the way in which the educational space fosters a sense of alienation, anxiety and anger in Black bodies, and especially the bodies of Black Women; also how the multidisciplinary Black women-led activist community provides a space of protest and refuge. Nyaruwata rethinks the academy as a space for Black women academics to mobilise, heal, and rebel against the restrictive university structure.

Kamohelo Mabogwane's 'On men and power: The frozen ideology of négritude and Black women's subversion of it' reflects on the necessity to resist the cishet Fanonian patriarchs, the new "fathers of consciousness", who insist on appropriating the discourses on activism, academia, activist academia and sometimes even feminism. Mabogwane argues that Black women's engagement with their Blackwom?nhood and decolonial thought is crucial to invigorate Black thought and scholarship in a way that keeps it relevant, resilient and moving with the times.

Lastly, in the section 'Nature nurturers: Locating Black African wom?n in the environmental discourse' Amanda Mokoena deals with the issue of land. Mokoena argues that the way in which women are associated with land (through tired tropes such as 'Mother Earth') are rooted in patriarchal discourses that denigrate women to something less than human. This section reflects on Black women's place in environmental discourses, and issues like exclusion from access to land and resources, participation in policymaking and the silencing of women's indigenous knowledges.

Amanda Mokoena's section resonates with feminist analyses of colonial rule and how it had weakened women's position by disrupting a decentralised political system in which women and men had shared political power. When women's economic positions, general wealth and health and reproductive capacities were threatened by growing male control and "native administrators", women performed healing rituals. Healing in this type of expression should be viewed as "the idea of mending social relations" (Berger, 2014:10-12). Berger argues that through national liberation struggles women continued to express ideas of public healing by focusing on motherhood and the ability to produce life as sources of empowerment (often criticised by Western feminists as essentialising women as mothers). Drawing on the Greenbelt Movement of Wangari Maathai in Kenya, Berger writes that the activism of Maathai and the Greenbelt Movement demonstrate the connections among environmental degradation, political empowerment and healing. This type of healing goes beyond the narrow definition of healing as in relation to illness. Historians have overlooked the importance of healing as a critical aspect of women's movements in Africa and how women's organising and protest in the 20th century and a commitment to healing have inspired movements of social change (particularly in moments of crisis) (Berger, 2014:17).

The challenges of funding for activism

In the latter half of the 20th century and the 21st century transnational organising has also become invaluable, when women connect across borders to engage in struggles of migration, climate change and persistent violence as a consequence of civil wars. Activism takes place in different domains, such as the academy, policy and in communities. National feminist forums were founded in Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Congo Brazzaville, SA, Zimbabwe and Liberia (Pereira, 2017:21). Post-conflict activism is also important to include women in peace agreements and settlements. Major disruptions of gender relations and roles lead to new leadership roles for women and quicken the pace of gender transformations in post-conflict societies, changes that are not observed in countries without conflict (Tripp, 2016:80). This leads to formation of women's organisations and also gendered opportunity structures that women can use to engage the State. Multi-party structures and constitutional reform open spaces for women to demand women's rights, women's representation (such as in Rwanda with 64% women in the legislature), as well as the rethinking of development, in line with Amartya Sen's view of development as freedom (Alvi, 2015). Transnationalism often leads to the NGOisation of women's organisations, that has its own drawbacks.

The article by Laura Hartmann shows the fine line for women's organisations between being co-opted when it gets money from the State or the problem of "barely surviving" when they are in abeyance of the State. To be in abeyance means that women's organisations will not engage the State, because it is viewed as a hostile environment and it also refers to "a holding process by which movements sustain themselves in nonreceptive environments" (Sawer in Bauer, 2011:36). When organisations become NGOs (NGOisation) they face similar problems with conditionalities imposed on them by funders (often from the Global North).

In '"*Los my poes af*" – the fine line between being radical and being too radical' Hartmann interviews Lucinda Evans, woman leader and human rights activist from Lavender Hill, who is the founder and director of non-governmental organisation Philisa Abafazi Bethu (PAB, isiXhosa for "heal our women"), which supports women and children in need.

The interview centres on a fundamental tension that women's organisations in SA must negotiate, namely between surviving financially and engaging in protest action that is radical enough to effect real change. Organisations that receive funding from government, political parties or international charity organisations, are often obliged to make certain compromises, like maintaining a professional public image, which places limitations on the kind of protest action that they can engage in. As a result, women activists are walking a tightrope between the equally important goals of, on the one hand, publicly demanding their rights, and on the other hand, ensuring the survival of the organisations they are running. In Evans's perspective, linkages and dependencies between political parties and civil society organisations diminish the radicality of the action undertaken by the township woman leaders and consequently lead to a loss of autonomy of the organisations concerned.

Because of Evans's insistence on maintaining the independence of her organisation, and her unwillingness to make undue compromises in her struggle to protect women's and children's rights, financial viability remains a struggle. However, after 10 years of experience as a woman activist, Evans is managing to find a balance between maintaining a professional public image, while not allowing herself or her organisation to be silenced. Although she is still loud and unruly, she works strategically, for example by cultivating a close working relationship with police departments. Her protests are loud, but unrelentingly peaceful. She remains radical in her actions through the way in which she expresses her demands (which would sometimes entail using strong and loaded words like "*poes*"), without relying on aggression and violence to make herself heard. In this way she is also challenging the public norms and values that prescribe what kinds of public protest are acceptable.

The personal is political - poetry as the instrument

Another way of making the personal political is through poetry. To reach a wider audience the radio, a more traditional medium than social media, but with a very wide reach and audience in SA, can be used as a vehicle for this type of activism and community building.

In her perspective piece 'Affirming our memories: Experiences and realities of feminist poets through the radio' Natalia Molebatsi explores feminist poetry on the radio as a form of feminist media activism. She looks specifically at SAfm's programme called Poetry in the Air (PitA), which aired between 2012 and 2016, and was pioneered by feminist poet Myesha Jenkins, concerned with the undoing of the erasure of the words and lives of Black and Queer women. Molebatsi explores two episodes featuring Lebogang Mashile and Makhosazana Xaba respectively.

In her analysis Molebatsi presents PitA as a space in which women build communities. She reflects on radio as a consciousness-raising tool, and how it remains a site for struggle and collective mobilisation. Molebatsi also looks at PitA as contributing to the creation of an "archive of the future", anchored in our collective memory as women, as poets, as feminists, as activists. Through PitA both the poet and her audience were enabled to engage with one another in a political/personal space that transcends geography and possibly time (because of the power of the archive as memory).

Molebatsi argues that both Mashile and Xaba insist on writing about people who are invisibilised – in order to reimagine and give a voice and a "personhood" to those whose dreams are often hidden. In this sense PitA offered lessons about both the representation of feminist poets on the radio as well as the feminist movement building more generally.

Included in this issue is some of Molebatsi's own searing and intensely personal feminist verse. Molebatsi's work contributes to a feminist archive as well as collective memory.

Queer activism

Activism is also necessary to disrupt the gender binary men/women, exposing the mobilisation and organising of, for example, lesbian feminists, or transgender or intersex people. This type of activism emphasises the importance of intersectionality of identities in analyses.

Gabriela Pinheiro and Clare Harvey use a feminist, intersectional methodological framework in '"We are a collective, a lot of us together, standing up": South Africa black lesbian women's activism against discourses of blackwashing homophobia', through which they place three feminist poststructural approaches in conversation with one another, namely Judith Butler's theory on performativity, Sara Ahmed's politicisation of affect, and feminist critical discourse analysis. Using this framework, they explore ways in which South African black lesbian women's activism alerts us to the socio-political conditions that condone violence against intersectional identities. In this article Pinheiro and Harvey work to show how South African black lesbian women's activism resists blackwashing homophobia and reveals discrimination as a product of white heteropatriarchy.

They write this article in response to the way in which discourses of blackwashing homophobia in South African mainstream media foreground the image of the black lesbian woman as an inevitable victim of grotesque crimes. These discourses work to cover up the structural inequalities that persist in post-apartheid SA, and thereby contribute to the erasure of the violence associated with whiteness and colonialism. Allowing these discourses to dominate the discussion on black queer identities results in a disavowal of possible resilience, pleasure, joy, solidarity, power, agency and activism that characterise the experience of intersectional identities.

Pinheiro and Harvey explore five texts from *Rainbow Girls*, an online documentary series by Netherlands-based photographer Julia Gunther, in which she documents experiences of black lesbian women in SA. Pinheiro and Harvey argue that the Rainbow Girls construct their identities in ways that challenge blackwashing homophobia. They highlight the mutual constitution of racial, gendered, sexual and other identities and thereby resist the way in which heteropatriarchal, master narratives of black lesbian identities try to split them apart. They conclude that through activism some South African black lesbian women seem to advocate for the realisation of intersectional citizenship and equal status in their communities and broader society.

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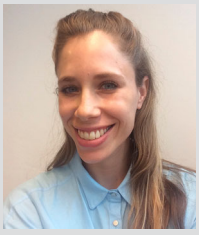

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